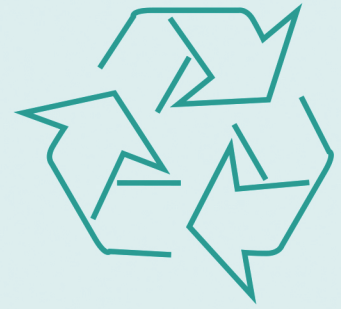


Is the water used to make a pair of jeans enough to drink for ten years?



By Wang Qi

How bad is the environmental impact of the fashion industry?

Carbon emissions

Carbon emissions from the fashion industry account for 10% of that of all industries and almost 70% of apparel are made from synthetic fibre produced using non-renewable energy. In light of the current growth rate, by 2050, the fashion industry may contribute 25-30% of the world's total carbon emissions.

Water pollution

The fashion industry is the second largest industry in terms of water consumption. The water needed to produce a white cotton shirt is enough for one person to drink eight cups of water per day for 3.5 years, while the water used to produce a pair of jeans would last for ten years.

Microplastics

Apparels made of synthetic fibre make up 35% of the microplastic pollution in the world. Many materials used by the fashion industry are not biodegradable. If they are dumped into ocean, they will not decompose and will instead be consumed by marine life.

Waste

The waste generated annually by the global textile and fashion industry amounts to 92 million tonnes. With current technologies, we can only recycle 20-25% of that waste.



A sustainable fashion movement

Sustainable fashion is a movement and process of fostering change in the fashion industry towards greater ecological integrity and social justice. Sustainable fashion involves addressing the industry's severe pollution problem and dealing with interdependent social, cultural, ecological, and financial systems.

1) Changes in consumer perceptions

Brands perceive that when a consumer buys clothes, they own the clothes. Can consumers break away from that perception, and see themselves as users (instead of owners) and share used clothes with others?

2) Innovation in business models

Brands should break through existing relationships with consumers. For example:

Circular fashion model

Although there are already a few very creative re-engineered brands, it is far

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from enough. Only when more players on the chain of sorting, classification, cleaning and re-engineering enter the picture will we be able to realize a sustainable and circular chain.

Leasing model

There are now platforms experimenting with leasing or pre-ordering models where consumers make monthly payments, are able to get new arrivals each month and then return their clothes to the platform after wearing them.

Sharing model

Can businesses provide a sharing platform where people can share clothes? Would consumers be willing to try on shared clothes? If the design is attractive, it might be possible.

3) Innovation in technology

In terms of technology, there are already a few signs of progress. However, the links in the technology are very disconnected and we need to put all the related parties together to enhance cooperation and information sharing and speed up the sustainable development of the fashion industry.

4) Policy innovation

Finance and investment policies

In some countries, there are now financial organisations that provide green loans for businesses. These organisations sign contracts with businesses, including a standard for annual carbon emissions and recycled materials, in exchange for low-interest or zero-interest loans. If companies do not meet these standards, their interest will go up.

Fiscal policies

Some governments are now promoting green or balanced fiscal policies. In addition to taxes levied for the use of natural resources, pollution discharged and exhaust emissions, governments



Wang Qi

CEIBS Professor of Marketing

should provide policies favourable to businesses specialising in recycling, cleaning, maintenance, and reproduction of used clothes.

Laws and regulations

China has already adopted a classification method to deal with recycled waste, but it is short of the unified standards needed to identify what should be recycled and how it should be recycled.

Green standards and certification

China is now setting standards for certification for which national-level standards are needed. This will allow consumers to tell if the clothes they have bought are recyclable and what the recyclable components are.